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The Prudential Towers and Charles River Park Apartments: The Effect of High Rise on Boston's Population

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The Prudential Towers and Charles River Park Apartments: The Effect of High Rise on Boston's Population

Introduction

During April 1970 a survey was taken of the residents of the Charles River Park and the Prudential Towers apartments by mail questionnaire. From the 1400 units in Charles River Park, 399 residents replied to the questionnaire. From the Prudential, 223 responses were received from its 781 units. There were 101 additional responses, unidentified as to apartment complex. Also, 196 questionnaires from Charles River Park and 23 from the Prudential Towers were returned unanswered, the occupants having moved without leaving a forwarding address.

The purpose of the survey and this report is to derive a picture of the inhabitants of these high rise complexes and to examine how high rise construction has affected Boston's population. A secondary purpose of the report is to determine what inhabitants feel are the advantages and disadvantages of living in Charles River Park and the Prudential Towers. The questionnaire was designed to discover where the residents of the buildings had moved from, how much they earned, how many people lived in each apartment, rent levels, parking needs, and the reasons that people had moved into the apartments.

* * *

The Charles River Park apartments opened for occupancy in 1962, and the Prudential apartments in 1967. The respondents to the questionnaire had lived in their apartments for varying lengths of time.

One-third of the respondents in Charles River Park had moved in from elsewhere in Boston and another third had moved there from the Boston metropolitan area. Of the remaining 34 per cent, 12 per cent came from elsewhere in New England, while 22 per cent had moved in from outside of New England. A similar pattern was found in the Prudential responses - 42 per cent came from Boston, 29 per cent from the suburbs, nine per cent from elsewhere in New England, and 20 per cent from outside of New England. The unclassified group of responses showed the same pattern as those identified by place of residence with a slightly larger percentage (27 per cent) coming from outside of New England.

An income breakdown of the occupants of Charles River Park and the Prudential Towers showed that the majority of the respondents are middle and upper income. Less than 1 per cent of the respondents reported that they made less than $5,000. Six per cent made $5,000-7,499; 11 per cent made

between $7,500-9,999; 12 per cent made $10,000-12,499; 11 per cent made between $12,500 and $14,999; 20 per cent made $15,000-20,000; and 39 per cent made over $20,000.

To determine whether significant numbers of high income people had moved into the complexes from outside the city, it was necessary to further subdivide the income figures.

In Charles River Park 269 (67 per cent) of the respondents had moved in from outside the city. Of these, approximately 39 per cent made over $20,000 a year; 21 per cent earned between $15,000 and $20,000; 13 per cent made between $12,500 and $14,999; 10 per cent made between $10,000 and $12,499. This left only 16 per cent who made less than $10,000. It is likely that some of these reporting lower incomes did not include investment income in their calculations.

At Prudential, 128 or about 57 per cent of the sample had moved in from outside of Boston. Of this total, 48 per cent made over $20,000 a year, 15 per cent earned $15,000 to $20,000, nine per cent made $12,500-14,999, 12 per cent made between $10,000 and $12,499. About 16 per cent made less than $10,000.

The income distribution of responses unclassified as to apartment complex was similar to that of Charles River Park and the Prudential Towers. We can conclude that the respondents who had moved into the apartments from outside the City were predominantly upper income.

Having determined where the respondents moved from and their income distribution, we wanted to know why these people moved into the apartments. What features attracted them? The questionnaire specified five categories, of which the respondent could check any or all that applied. These categories were as follows: the quality of the apartment, closer to work, closer to the social and cultural advantages of Boston, closer to friends, and other.

Answers to this question were similar from both Charles River Park and the Prudential. The only responses which differed significantly between apartment complexes were those pertaining to the quality of the apartment. Almost 80 per cent of the Prudential residents indicated that one of the reasons why they moved in was the reputed quality of the apartment, compared to only 60 per cent from Charles River Park.

In total, 66 per cent of the respondents moved in because of the quality of the apartment, 57 per cent to be closer to work, 38 per cent to be closer to the social and cultural advantages of Boston, and about 9 percent to be closer to friends.

About 35 per cent of the total indicated various other reasons including the general convenience of the locations, the parking space available with the complexes, the security systems, and health needs (they are elevator buildings). In some cases, residents reported that the apartments were the only ones to be found in the short time allotted to locate in the city. In Charles River Park, several of the people had moved in because their employers, usually Massachusetts General Hospital, subsidized the apartment. Also, many people relocating from within the City to either set of apartments did so to get away from the growing number of students living near their previous residence, particularly on Beacon Hill and along Commonwealth Avenue.

The age of the respondent made some difference as to why they moved in, but there were no clear trends, except that the per cent of people who said they had moved in to be closer to work declined as age increased. Significantly, it was not true in all cases that the per cent of people moving in for reasons of safety and security increased as age increased. It was, however, true in the Prudential, where 19 per cent of the people over 60 reported security as a factor in their decision to move in, compared to six per cent for the 30-60 group and seven

per cent for the 18-30 age group. However, in Charles River Park 16 per cent of the 18-30 age group indicated that they had moved in because of the offered security as compared to four per cent for the 30-60 group, and three per cent for the over 60 group.

Over 60 per cent of the principal wage earners worked within walking distance of their apartments. Fifteen per cent more worked in Boston, but not within walking distance. Eleven per cent worked in the suburbs, while 14 per cent were retired or worked elsewhere. With the predicted growth of Boston's economy, and considering the increase in numbers of high paying jobs in the city, it can be expected that the demand for high rise apartments in the city will continue to grow.

Continuing to look at the population of Charles River Park and the Prudential Towers, it was found that the greatest number of responses indicated that one person occupied the dwelling unit - almost 47 per cent of the total. Forty-one per cent reported that two people lived in the apartment. There were, proportionately, very few families with children reporting, although it may be true that even this small number represented an oversampling of families with children. (A telephone conversation with the management of Prudential Towers indicated that our sample included all the children living there.) About

seven per cent of the responses indicated three people per apartment, about four per cent showed four people. Less than one per cent of the responses showed more than four persons.

Of the 53 per cent of responses which showed more than one person occupying the dwelling unit, 80 per cent indicated that the inhabitants were related, twenty per cent were not related.

The age distribution of the inhabitants was not uniform. The majority (about 45 per cent) were in the 30 to 60 age range, 25 per cent of the people were between 18 and 30, and about 24 per cent were over 60. Only about six per cent were under 18.

Most of the occupants reported that they had cars, even though they have easy access to public transportation and monthly parking fees in the apartment parking garages are high (generally $40-50 per month). Approximately 55 per cent had one car, nine per cent had two cars, and slightly over one per cent had more than two cars. This left slightly under 35 per cent with no cars.

The major advantage given for living in both complexes was general convenience of location - to public transportation (mentioned by about twenty per cent of the respondents), to super highways (about 10 per cent), and to such things as stores, theatres, banks, museums, and hospitals (62 per cent). Both complexes are within walking distance of the central business district. About

sixteen per cent of the Charles River Park residents also mentioned the advantages of nice view and open space close by. Only five per cent of the Prudential residents cited such things.

Other advantages which were mentioned, but not as frequently, were the available parking facilities, security, and the good quality of the apartment, management and maintenance. Significantly, higher percentages of people in the Prudential spoke of good quality of the apartment, management, and maintenance, and security as opposed to those in Charles River Park - 21 per cent and 26 per cent versus 12 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. A factor related specifically to Charles River Park was the availability of recreation facilities (mentioned by 11 per cent of the respondents).

The disadvantage most often mentioned was the high cost of living in both the complexes. This included both the high cost of rent and the high cost of extras such as parking and recreation fees. However, a lower percentage of people in the Prudential, than in Charles River Park felt that the rent was too high - 16 per cent vs. 29 per cent. This could be explained in two ways. The residents of the Prudential are slightly better off than those of Charles River Park, and the figures tend to bear this out. A higher per cent of the Prudential respondents made more than $20,000 a year than did those of Charles River Park -

49 per cent vs. 34 per cent. A second possibility is that the Prudential residents are more likely to feel that the high quality of services offered is worth the money. This second explanation is borne out by the reaction to the Prudential's management, security, and maintenance. Only three per cent complained about the management, eight per cent about the security (and this was mainly in terms of security in the general area, not the complex itself), and one per cent about the maintenance, as opposed to 13 percent, 14 per cent, and 10 per cent respectively for Charles River Park.

Other disadvantages of living in the complexes were the high cost of parking - this was cited by over 11 per cent of the total respondents, and also the fact that guests had to pay for parking. Small numbers of people also mentioned that there was no spirit of community in the apartment buildings, no private yards, and that the architecture was bleak and barren.

Other disadvantages mentioned by significant numbers were not factors of the apartment complexes as such, but rather were complaints applicable to City life in general. About 24 per cent of the respondents complained of air pollution and dirt, while close to 18 per cent were unhappy about traffic congestion and noise. Approximately 8 per cent of the people also complained about undesirable people in the general area surrounding the complexes. Usually, they spoke of students or "hippie-type" youth.

Conclusion

The survey showed that the objective of building high rise apartments in the city - to expand the tax base of the city by bringing in middle and upper-income people - was in fact accomplished. Only 16 per cent of the respondents reported that they earned less than $10,000 a year.

With the number of high paying jobs in the city growing, and with the knowledge that about 60 per cent of the respondents had moved in, at least partially, to be closer to their jobs, it is reasonable to expect that the demand for high rise apartment construction will increase.

Rent and Utilities

	Charles River Park	Prudential	Total (including un differentiat
Under $175	2.4%	1.9%	2.0%
175-215	16.9%	18.1%	17.9%
216-255	14.8%	11.1%	13.5%
256-295	17.2%	21.3%	18.0%
296-335	19.3%	12.5%	16.7%
336-375	15.6%	9.3%	13.3%
376-410	6.6%	10.2%	8.1%
411-450	3.2%	4.2%	3.7%
451-500	1.6%	3.7%	2.3%
Over 500	2.4%	7.9%	4.5%

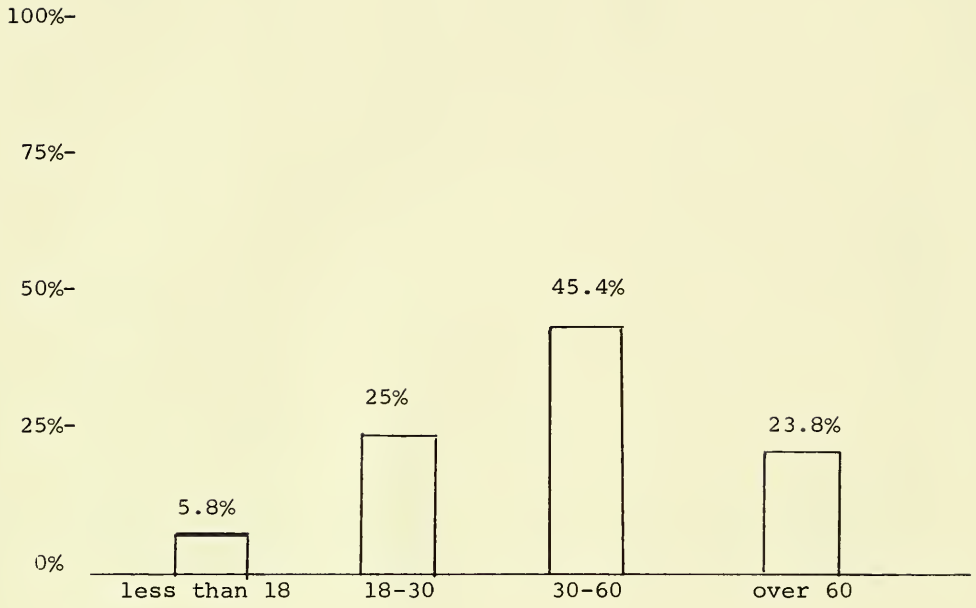
Note: There were 723 respondents to the questionnaire.

Income

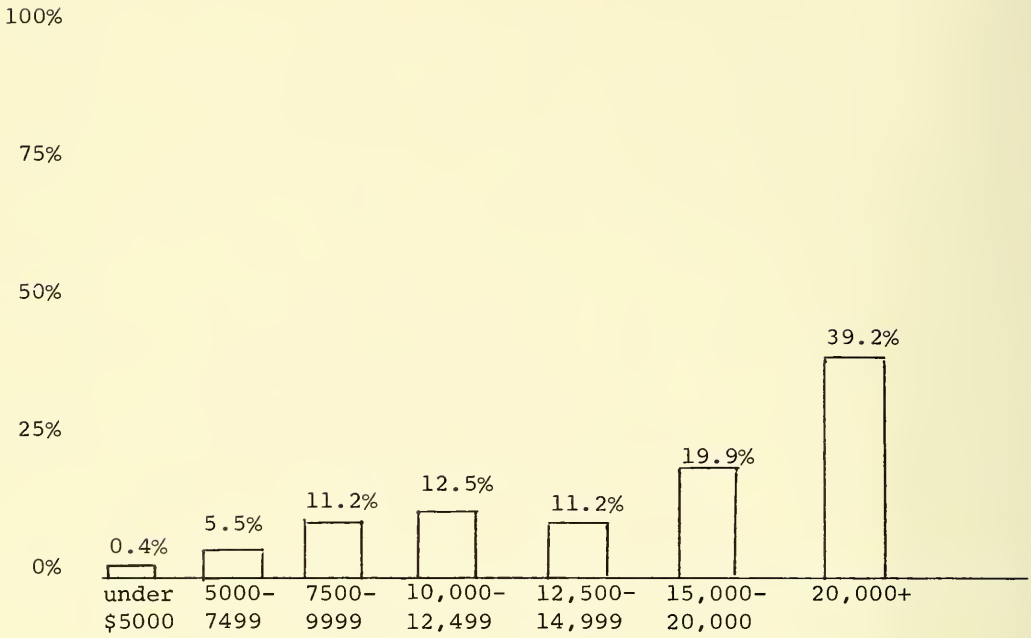
Where Respondent Moved From	Under $5,000	5000-7499	7500-9999	10,000-12,499	12,500-14,999	15,000-20,000	20,000+
Elsewhere in Boston	0.1%	2.2%	4.0%	5.7%	4.3%	6.2%	12.5%
Boston Metropolitan Area	0.3%	2.2%	3.8%	3.2%	3.5%	5.4%	14.4%
Elsewhere in New England	0 %	0.7%	1.3%	1.5%	0.7%	2.9%	3.8%
Outside of New England	0.1%	0.1%	1.9%	2.1%	2.6%	4.6%	9.6%
	0.5%	5.2%	11.0%	12.5%	11.1%	19.1%	40.3%

Note: There were 723 respondents to the questionnaire.

Age Distribution of Residents



Income Distribution of Families



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